

## Gifts: \$1.4 Billion

Protestant and Orthodox churchgoers in the U.S. gave a record \$1,401,114,217 to their churches last year, reported the National Council of Churches. Leaders in giving: the Methodists (\$289,791,195), Southern Baptists (\$248,004,319), Northern Presbyterians (\$126,455,475). Highest per capita givers: the Seventh-Day Adventists, with an average contribution of \$165.26 per member.

## Whose Eschatology?

In August 1954, at Evanston, Ill., the World Council of Churches will hold the second General Assembly in its five-year history. The 750 churchmen participating will represent an estimated 168,000,000 Protestant and Orthodox Christians. As assembly time gets closer, most of the world's Protestant theologians are getting deeper and deeper in the preliminary debate over the council's agreed theme: Christ—the Hope of the World.

To plain laymen, the nature of Christian hope may seem too self-evident to permit much argument, but it is in fact a knotty problem on which Protestant theologians are hotly divided. The key word in the preliminary discussions, held since 1951, has been "eschatology," a \$15 Greek term meaning, literally, the last things, and, theologically, the manner of the Judgment, the resurrection of the body, the Second Coming of Christ, etc.

**Two Versions.** There are two distinct Protestant versions of Christian hope. One of them is prevailingly held by European theologians, the other by those American theologians most actively associated with the World Council. The Europeans tend to be Biblically strict constructionist and socially pessimistic. They hold that things on this dreary earth will never really get better—despite all that Christians might like to do meanwhile—until Christ comes again to judge and sanctify it.

The Americans tend to be loose constructionist and socially optimistic. They contend that God works partly through human history, and that Christians, through their active corporate witness, must help improve their world. The two points of view are not mutually exclusive, although sometimes it would seem so.

**Two Frontiers.** Last week Dr. Willem Visser 't Hooft, general secretary of the World Council, dropped into Chicago, to make arrangements for next year's meeting. Said Dutchman Visser 't Hooft, speaking of eschatology: "The theme of hope was chosen because of its relevance in the world today, when so many areas show a certain hopelessness, while elsewhere there are certain false hopes, e.g., under a totalitarian ideology such as the Communist . . . There are two dimensions to Christian hope—one dealing in the present and one dealing in the future . . . Both dimensions of Christian hope are vital."

Most of the world's Protestant leaders



Walter Bennett  
SECRETARY VISSER 't HOOFT  
With optimistic fellowship.

will come to Evanston. Among them: Germany's Bishop Otto Dibelius, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Norway's Bishop Eivind Berggrav, Bishops G. Bromley Oxnam and Henry Knox Sherrill and Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr from the U.S.\* But Dr. Visser 't Hooft was hopeful that delegates from the Iron Curtain churches would be there, too. Said

\* An absentee who will be sorely missed: famed Swiss Theologian Karl Barth, 67, too busy with his work on dogmatics to make the trip. Wrote Barth, a strict constructionist: "I probably won't see the U.S. in this life, but I hope to see it from one of the lower reaches of heaven."



THEOLOGIAN BARTH  
In pessimistic solitude.

he: "It's a way to emphasize Christian fellowship, and some of these churches have a great deal to give us."

He conceded that U.S. public opinion is not too friendly to some European church leaders, especially those in Communist countries. A case in point is Prague University's Dr. Joseph Hromadka, who sounded to many like a Communist apologist at the 1948 World Council meetings in Amsterdam and at similar meetings since. But he asked the U.S. to be broad-minded about such things, as well as the theological differences. Said he: "The foreign churches will be here not as guests but with exactly the same rights as the American delegates . . . We would ask the American press to make a special act of imagination about the Evanston assembly—to think of it not just as a purely American meeting, but as an ecumenical and truly international meeting . . ."

Will the Iron Curtain countries' delegates come? Answered Visser 't Hooft: "That question has two sides. First, whether the Iron Curtain delegates can get out of their countries. Second, whether they can get into this country."

## Malediction

Through his 39 years of earthly reign, Father Divine has hurled many a curse at the conspicuously unbelieving.\* Last week he leveled his biggest blast in years. The main target: Sociologist Sara Harris, 34, whose recent book, *Father Divine: Holy Husband* (Doubleday; \$3.95), is a sprightly study of Father and his cult.

To get her material, Author Harris and her collaborator, Harriet Crittenden, spent ten weeks at Father's 32-room "Country Seat of the World" near Philadelphia, interviewing Father Divine, Mother Divine and a cross section of the followers. The book is written with considerable sympathy for the followers, and notes the laudable by-products of Father's teachings, e.g., his "angels" are exceptionally law-abiding citizens. But the book was too much for Father.

His malediction, pronounced in a sermon and letters to indignant followers, was reported in last week's issue of the *New Day*, his movement's newspaper. It ranges sweepingly over the book's "Writers, Publishers, Republishers, and those concerned. All Publications, Readers, Sympathizers, Harmonizers, Believers, Critics, Followers, Preachers and Priests, as well as Nations and others that coincide with those lies published in that book . . . They are cursed with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with the sword . . . They shall be smitten with botch of Egypt, with fire, with burning, with emeralds, with madness and blindness and heart trouble . . ."

"I am a dynamo of salvation and yet destruction to those who contact me inharmoniously . . . I have cursed them

\* One notable curse: Judge Lewis J. Smith of Mineola, L.I., who, as Father Divine's followers are fond of noting portentously, died (at 50) some four days after he sentenced Father to jail (for constituting a public nuisance) in 1932. Said Father from his cell: "I hated to do it."



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down to the bottomless pit on earth . . . I curse them without mercy. I curse them without pity. I curse without compassion or any sympatheticness . . . Aren't you glad?"

Echoed Father's applauding congregation: "Yes, so glad."

## Of Men & Dignity

Following custom, the Roman Catholic bishops of the U.S. met in annual session last week, and gave thought to the state of the church, the nation and the world. From their meeting in Washington came two carefully pondered messages.

The first, entitled "Peter's Chains," addressed itself sharply to the persecution of Catholic priests and communicants behind the Iron Curtain. "We in the free countries," the bishops said, "still speak of a cold war; these men and women are enduring the bitterest, the bloodiest persecution in all history . . ."

"When will men in the free world come to realize that the crisis of today is first of all a crisis of religion, that the Communist debaser of man is essentially a hater of God, and that both his long-range and his short-range purpose is the destruction of Christianity?"

**Person & Things.** But it was the second message, issued at meeting's end, which contained the bishops' traditional text of the year. Ignoring headlines and specific day-to-day events, they gave this statement the simple title, "The Dignity of Man." Excerpts:

"The Catholic Church has always taught and defended the natural dignity of every human being . . . She has reminded mankind that there is a great division between 'things' and 'men.' She has never forgotten that 'things' were made for men and that 'men' were made for God . . ."

"The practical social theory of the last century enthroned the individual but not the person. An individual can be a thing, as for instance, an individual tree; but in virtue of his rational soul, a person is more than a thing. Yet the depersonalized view of man gained ascendancy, and generated a society which was a crisscross of individual egotisms and in which each man sought his own."

"Against this error, our century has seen a reaction which has sought to overcome the isolation of man from man by imposing upon rebellious individuals a pattern of compulsory and all-embracing state organization, with unlimited power in the hands of the civil government. Hence socialism, in its various guises . . . The Christian concept of man, however, is that he is both personal and social . . . The Christian view . . . avoids the opposing extremes of individualism and collectivism, both of which are grounded on false concepts of liberty . . ."

**A Festering Wound.** "Liberty . . . is something more than a political phenomenon, as tyrannical dictatorship contends; it is more than an economic phenomenon, as some disciples of free enterprise maintain. It is something more mature than that dream of rights without responsibilities

which historic liberalism envisioned; it is certainly different from that terrorism of responsibilities without rights which Communism imposes. It is something wiser than free thought, and something freer than dictated thought. For freedom has its roots in man's spiritual nature. It does not arise out of any social organization, or any constitution, or any part, but out of the soul of man . . ."

"Closely connected with freedom and human dignity is the right of private property . . . The Christian position maintains that the right to property is personal, while the use of property is also social. Unrestrained capitalism makes its mistake by divorcing property rights from social use; Communism hits wide of the mark by considering social use apart from personal rights."

"Much of our economic restlessness, however, is the festering of man's wounded dignity . . . modern men have tended to concentrate almost exclusively on economic security and to pursue it at times with the fervor of religious devotion."

"Often the hope is voiced that man will turn to the cultivation of the spirit after all his economic needs are supplied. We are reminded of the delusion of Jean Jacques Rousseau, that man, good in himself, has been corrupted only by society . . . While we acknowledge the evils, individual and spiritual as well as social, which often flourish in a society when many are forced to live in conditions of degrading poverty, yet we cannot refrain from pointing out the fact that man's goodness is from within . . . Economic and social reform, to be effective, must be preceded by personal reform . . ."

**Neither Hand nor Stomach.** "It is only in the light of the spiritual worth of man that the dignity and importance of labor become evident . . . The worker is not a hand, as individualistic capitalism contends; not a stomach to be fed by commissars, as Communism thinks; but a person who through his labor establishes three relations: with God, with his neighbor, and with the whole natural world . . . God, the Supreme Artist, has communicated artistic causality to men, so that they can now make things and shape events to the image and likeness of their own ideas . . ."

"Every day in Holy Mass, Almighty God is addressed as He who wondrously established the dignity of man, and restored it more wondrously still. Only by regaining our reverence for God can we of America in the 20th century rediscover both our own value and the solid basis on which it rests . . ."

"The alternative is increasing chaos. The words of a contemporary historian of culture\* may serve to summarize the issues at stake: 'Unless we find a way to restore the contact between the life of society and the life of the spirit, our civilization will be destroyed by the forces which it has had the knowledge to create but not wisdom to control.'"

\* Britain's Christopher Dawson, in his book, *Understanding Europe*.